

Letter 25

April 15, 1949

My dear Mr. Voegelin,

Your letter of March 22 remained unanswered for so long because in the meantime my first quarter in Chicago began and I was rather preoccupied with it. Yesterday I received a copy of the *Review of Politics* with your review of my work.⁵³ It pleased me greatly to see that it was printed in *toto* after all. Your review, with a single exception, will be and remain the only one that contributes to the discussion. The exception is a review promised by Alexander Kojève (the author of *Introduction à l'étude de Hegel*, an exceptional work [Gallimard, 1947])⁵⁴ in the journal *Critique*.⁵⁵ Kojève depicts himself as a Stalinist, but would be immediately shot in the USSR. As soon as Kojève's review appears, I intend to write a critique of both of your critiques. Gurian, who visited me two days ago, will leave me space in the *Review of Politics*.⁵⁶ Because I would like to do this, I will save my ammunition. I am doing this also since I want to think over your objections.

Regarding Spinoza, I attempted in my German work on Spinoza (1930) to define more exactly the connection with Calvinism (with Luther, in my opinion, there is no connection at all).⁵⁷ I believe now, that then I fell too much into the trap of Spinoza's accommodations. His intertheological preferences are essentially of a tactical nature except for the general one, that he prefers theological rationalism *qua* rationalism over every fideism. For me personally, the most important thing in the essay that you have read is that I succeeded in interpreting "*ad captum vulgi*" authentically. "Sometime" I will point out the coherence of Spinoza's moral philosophy: it is perhaps the most interesting example of an ethics based on modern natural science (in the sense of a modernity "more advanced" than the Hobbesian one).

53. See Letter 20.

54. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. R. Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); trans. James H. Nichols, ed. A. Bloom, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

55. See Letter 21, note.

56. Strauss's reply was not published in the *Review of Politics*; see Letter 21, note.

57. Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft: Untersuchungen zu Spinozas theologisch-Politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1930); trans. E. M. Sinclair, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1965).

Unfortunately, because the semester began, I had to leave Lucretius to one side in order to turn to the Lucretian-grounded Rousseau, the *Discours sur l'origine d'Inégalité*. I hope that this time I will cope with this political writing of J. J. and can in the fall submit an essay about it (a continuation of the essay in *Social Research*).⁵⁸ This work contains in germ all that comes later (for example Kant, Marx . . .). I do not yet know if it will be possible for me to point out everything that is in it.

I want to say only this about Lucretius today: his poem is the purest and most glorious expression of the attitude that elicits consolation from the utterly hopeless truth, on the basis of its being only the truth—there is no idea of the use of the hopeless, godless truth for some social purpose, as is almost always the case with other fashions or trends; nor is there any aestheticism or sentimentality. I do not believe that people like Santayana or Valéry can understand Lucretius. The next approximation in our world is the scientifically slanted aspect of Nietzsche.—As for Lucretius's "personality"? I do not believe it matters. Nor does his Romanness: his poem tries precisely to be free from "Romanness" (among other things): *primum Graius homo*—this means not the Romans.

Hope to hear from you soon. With warm wishes,

Yours,
Leo Strauss

Letter 26

17.12.49

My Dear Mr. Voegelin,

Warmest thanks for your analysis of the *Gorgias*, which I read with great interest.⁵⁹ Your position has become significantly clearer to me, and thus also the point at which I do not quite understand you. We are quite in agreement that in the dialogues *nostra res agitur*, [and] that it is therefore possible in particular to say that Plato's critique of the sophists is a critique of "intellectuals." The question is only whether you first of all interpret in the obvious way *nostra res* and therefore [believe] the reason for the reprehensibility of the

58. See Letter 16.

59. Voegelin, "The Philosophy of Existence: Plato's *Gorgias*," *The Review of Politics* 11 (1949): 477–98.